



# Feedback Essentials

## About this Topic: Feedback Essentials

### Topic Mentor

#### Interaction Associates, Inc.

[Interaction Associates, Inc.](#) is a performance-improvement company offering a powerful suite of collaboration consulting and learning services. The company equips clients with practical new strategies, skills, and mindsets, so they can leverage the power of collaborative action to solve problems and create opportunities. Since 1969, Interaction Associates has helped global leaders, the Fortune 100, and government agencies to overcome their most difficult challenges.

### Topic Source Notes

#### Learn

Karen Massetti Miller, Shirley Poertner. *The Art of Giving & Receiving Feedback*. West Des Moines, IA: American Media, Inc., 1996.

Tony Alessandra, Michael J. O'Connor with Janice Van Dyke. *People Smarts: Bending the Golden Rule to Give Others What They Want*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994.

Harvard Business School Publishing. *Harvard ManageMentor on Giving and Receiving Feedback: A Practical Guide to Sharing Reactions and Reviews*. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2003.

Interaction Associates. "Essential Facilitation." A four-day intensive workshop taught in cities across the United States.

Interaction Associates. "Facilitative Leadership: Tapping the Power of Participation." A three-day workshop taught in cities across the United States.

Joe Folkman and Gene Dalton. *Turning Feedback into Change*. Provo, UT: Novations Group, Inc., 1996.

#### Steps

Interaction Associates. "Essential Facilitation." A four-day intensive workshop taught in cities across the United States.

Interaction Associates. "Facilitative Leadership: Tapping the Power of Participation." A three-day workshop taught in cities across the United States.

Joe Folkman and Gene Dalton. *Turning Feedback into Change*. Provo, UT: Novations Group, Inc., 1996.

## Tips

Interaction Associates. "Essential Facilitation." A four-day intensive workshop taught in cities across the United States.

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## Tools

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## What Would You Do?

### What would you do?

Ever since Laura and Betsy became friendly, Betsy's work has started to slip. She frequently comes late to work. And then she leaves early. She misses important meetings. As Betsy's manager, Laura knows she has to say something. She is frustrated by Betsy's cavalier attitude. Her constant tardiness is having a negative impact on the group. Laura has scheduled a meeting for the two of them to talk. Laura sits in her office thinking about what she will say and how she will handle this uncomfortable situation.

### What would you do?

Laura might begin the conversation by describing the recent behavior she has seen. She should be as specific as possible, indicating exactly when and the number of times Betsy has missed meetings or showed up late for work. Laura should then describe how Betsy's behavior is having a negative impact on the team. For example, Laura might say something like, "When you arrive late for a meeting we must repeat information for you, and this wastes other people's time." Next, Laura should give Betsy the opportunity to speak so that she can express her point of view. Laura should listen actively and work together with Betsy to come up with a plan on how they will move forward.

In this topic, you'll learn how to give effective feedback when it is appropriate and receive feedback that others give to you.

How can you deliver constructive feedback without damaging your work relationships?

## Topic Objectives

This topic contains relevant information on how to:

- Give effective feedback when it is appropriate
- Receive feedback and act on it
- Identify strategies for resolving feedback breakdowns
- Respond to critical feedback

## Sharing objective messages



In business, feedback is simply the sharing of observations about job performance or work-related behaviors. For many people, however, the word feedback connotes judgment, so that neither giver nor receiver looks forward to feedback moments.

But feedback shouldn't be a judgment about another person. Instead, it is meant to be an objective message about behavior and its consequences, either to recognize a job well done or to suggest how to improve performance. If delivered successfully, feedback should encourage the recipient to move forward by learning, growing, and changing in a positive direction.

## The goals of feedback

“ It takes two to speak the truth – one to speak and another to hear. ”  
–Henry David Thoreau

You can give feedback in different directions: up to those to whom you report, down to those you manage, and laterally to your colleagues. And you may receive feedback from any of these directions as well. Viewed from this multidirectional perspective, feedback is an important contributor to organizational learning.

The goal of giving positive feedback is to reinforce preferred behaviors or patterns of problem solving. The goal of corrective feedback, on the other hand, is to change and improve unsatisfactory behavior or introduce more productive work patterns.

## Key Idea: Recognize the importance of feedback

### Key Idea

When you give constructive feedback to others, you are:

- Reinforcing or encouraging a more effective way of working

- Redirecting a behavior or pointing out a more productive path of action
- Ensuring appropriate standards are set for individual and team performance
- Helping the recipient to prepare for better performance

It is important that your feedback be framed in positive terms, as negativity will make it less effective.

When you receive constructive feedback from others, take advantage of those opportunities to:

- Better understand the impact of your behavior and choices on others
- Gain new perspectives on work flow
- Show you value their opinions and trust their judgment
- Establish measurable goals for yourself

Providing effective feedback is a skill that comes into play not only when completing the day-to-day work that must get done, but also during coaching sessions and performance assessments.

Want to fine-tune your team's performance? Start by recognizing the value of giving and receiving constructive feedback.

## Leadership Insight: The power of feedback

As I've thought about developing leaders, I've come to realize that leadership and learning are synonymous.

There is no leadership without learning and really there is no learning without leadership. The two need to be held very closely connected.

If I were to give young leaders some advice, I would say, "Seek feedback. Feedback is a gift whether it is 360, whether it is feedback from your colleagues or whether it is feedback from your boss or people who report to you. Seek out feedback."

Take comfort that people are giving you feedback on what you do well and where your growth areas are. Really relish that opportunity to self-develop. Find a mentor. Find a good coach. Find someone that will give you straight talk and candid feedback on where your key areas for development are.

We really value learning agility in leaders and the ability to continually adapt, to learn, to take appropriate risks, to reflect on what you are doing, whether that be in the form of a journal or whether that be in the form of a daily meditation or a daily practice.

You really are the author of your own development. It is not something you can outsource and you can't leave it behind.

So remember, as you seek to develop your leadership and your career, always remember that leadership and learning are two sides of the same coin.

Seeking out productive, honest feedback is the key to learning and strengthening your leadership skills.

**Larry Kaye****Senior Vice President of Leadership & Organization Development,  
Fidelity Investments**

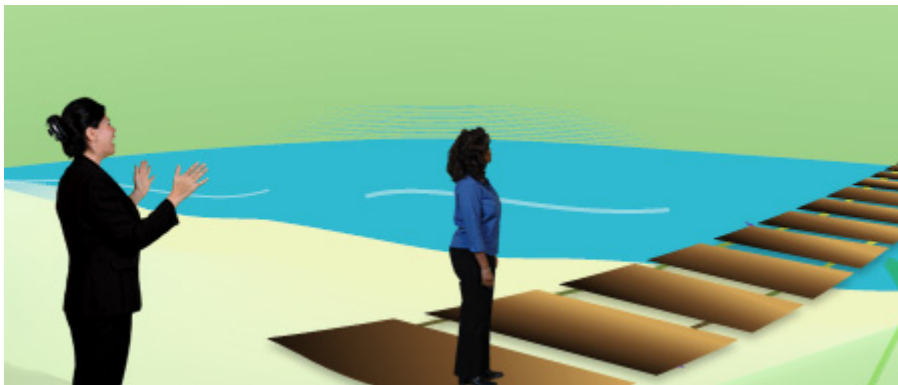
As Senior Vice President of Leadership & Organization Development for Fidelity Human Resources, Larry Kaye leads the Talent Management Center of Excellence. Larry is responsible for the design, execution, and delivery of leadership development, talent, and succession planning and performance management across Fidelity Investments.

In his earlier career at Fidelity, he was Senior Vice President of Client Readiness at Fidelity Human Resource Services (FHRS), preparing major corporate clients for conversion to Fidelity's suite of HR outsourcing systems and services.

Larry also previously worked for Cap-Gemini Ernst & Young, designing and delivering organizational effectiveness programs for global clients. He has worked as an independent consultant with clients including Johnson & Johnson, American Airlines, and American Express.

Larry holds a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts in political science and a doctorate in sociology, all from Brandeis University.

## Timing is everything



In some ways, knowing when to give feedback is easier than you may realize; you just have to train yourself to recognize the most appropriate moments. Offer feedback when the following types of situations arise:

- **When good work, successful projects, and resourceful behavior need to be recognized.** Positive feedback is not given often enough, and yet its benefits can be great.
- **When the probability of successfully improving a person's skills is high.** Skills that can be learned are more easily changed than a person's habits or personality.
- **When a problem cannot be ignored;** that is, when the person's behavior has a negative impact on the team or organization.

## Timing feedback well

People tend to give feedback right away, in an impromptu manner. An immediate response can be useful because the incident is fresh in everyone's minds. However, there is an inherent danger in reacting quickly: You may react before you have all the necessary facts and information, or while people's feelings are still too turbulent. Feedback under these circumstances may be damaging. Therefore, it is best to be sensitive to the situation when deciding exactly when to give feedback. There are no hard and fast rules about timing feedback, so it is best to be flexible.

For example:

- You may decide to provide feedback as soon as you can after you observe the behavior you want to correct or reinforce if you have all the necessary information—and that the recipient would be open to it.
- You may need to pause long enough to gather all the necessary information before discussing an issue.
- If the behavior you observed was particularly upsetting, you may need to give everyone (including yourself) time to calm down.

The right time to deliver feedback depends on the situation and on the recipient. Try to determine whether the person is ready to accept your message; otherwise, the feedback might not be heard.

## Activity: When should you give feedback?

Identify the best timing for a manager to provide feedback to a direct report.

During a Monday morning meeting, William was leading a brainstorming session with his team. The meeting was scheduled to run for two hours with one break in the middle of the meeting. During the meeting, William noticed that Veronica would repeatedly shoot down the ideas of her teammates, without offering any ideas of her own.

When should William address this behavior?

- ☐ As soon as he can after he observes the behavior

**Correct choice.** Since the meeting is scheduled for a long period of time, William should speak privately to Veronica during the break. Providing corrective feedback as soon as possible would make the rest of the meeting more productive.

- ☐ After he gathers information about Veronica's behavior in other meetings over the past year

**Not the best choice.** The longer William waits, the more damaging Veronica's behavior is.

- ☐ After he has given himself and others a chance to calm down

**Not the best choice.** This incident has not caused high emotion in the group. So, it is better to address it as soon as possible.

Olivia met with Vu, a member of her team, and two members of the finance department to discuss next year's budget. Because her department had not performed to market expectations,

the finance department wanted to reduce her budget the following year. On the contrary, Olivia and Vu believed that *more* money was required to get their department back on track. After a heated discussion, she noticed that Vu's face was red and that he had stopped contributing to the conversation.

After the meeting, she wondered when she should address his behavior. What do you think she should do?

- ☐ As soon as she can after she observes the behavior

**Not the best choice.** Addressing the issue with Vu while he is still angry may only exacerbate the issue.

- ☐ After she pauses long enough to gather all the necessary information before discussing an issue.

**Not the best choice.** Aside from exploring Vu's feelings, Olivia was present during the entire meeting. Most likely, she has all of the facts.

- ☐ After she has given Vu and others a chance to calm down

**Correct choice.** This incident has caused high emotion for Vu. Olivia should give him time to calm down before she addresses the reasons for his behavior.

Jonathan knew he would be late to lead his team meeting, so he asked Jan to begin the meeting without him. When he arrived, he discovered that the team was involved in a heated discussion. Specifically, he saw that one member of the team, Donald, was the focus of the team's displeasure. Jonathan knew that Donald sometimes made insensitive statements to team members that some felt were unprofessional.

When should Jonathan address the issue?

- ☐ As soon as he joins the meeting

**Not the best choice.** Addressing the situation immediately would consume the remaining time of the meeting and emotions in the group are too high. Jonathan needs to find out the facts first before deciding what to do.

- ☐ After the meeting, when he has had a chance to gather all the necessary information

**Correct choice.** Jonathan does not have all of the facts and should wait until after the meeting to speak with Donald and other team members to understand what had happened. This approach would also give Jonathan a chance to give Donald feedback in private.

- ☐ At Donald's next performance review

**Not the best choice.** Jonathan needs to find out the facts of the situation immediately and provide feedback to Donald in private. He should not wait until Donald's next performance review.

## Key Idea: Prepare for formal feedback sessions

### Key Idea

Most of the feedback you give will probably be on-the-go responses to immediate situations. However, setting up a formal feedback session can provide a more orderly process for learning and growth.

In these situations, take the time to do your homework beforehand to ensure that the session goes smoothly. During your preparation phase, think through the ways in which differences in gender, race, age, and communication style may lead to different perspectives on an issue. Be attentive to the ways in which these factors may play a crucial role in how your message is received, and in how you might be able to bridge gaps.

For example, consider adapting your method of giving feedback to the communication style you think would be most comfortable for the recipient.

Take these actions to prepare for a formal feedback session:

- Gather all the data, facts, and information you need to present an objective view of the issue.
- Consider the recipient's point of view when planning what you are going to say. Try to understand who the person is, and how he or she wants to grow.
- Anticipate the person's response to the feedback you will provide.
- Separate feedback from formal performance evaluations.

How can you maximize the effectiveness of your formal feedback sessions? Prepare by considering these four principles.

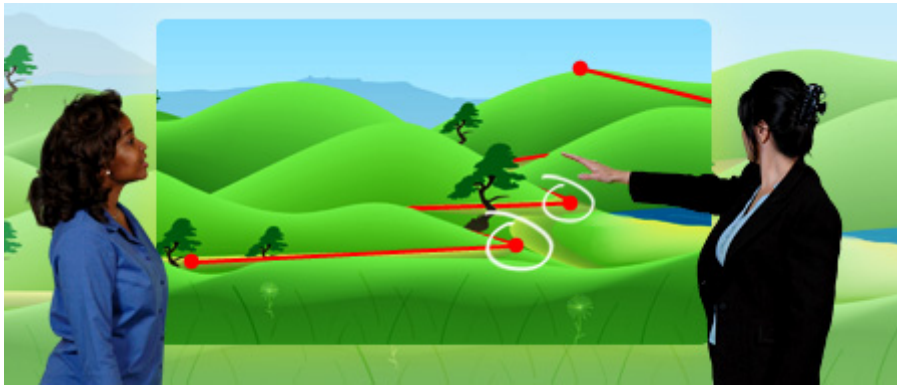
## Feedback sessions versus performance evaluations

Be aware that a formal feedback session is not the same as a performance evaluation meeting. While both are useful tools in a manager's arsenal, they have different purposes. The focus of a performance evaluation is to review an employee's past work, while the emphasis of a feedback session is on looking to the future and determining how the employee can grow.

Feedback sessions are conducted by two (or sometimes more) people on an as-needed basis, whereas formal performance appraisals are conducted between supervisors and their direct reports at regular intervals (usually every six months or at least once a year).

## Focus on what can be improved





When giving corrective feedback, focus on improving performance—don't use feedback simply to criticize. Make sure the feedback is future-focused: Pick issues that can be reworked in the future. For example, feedback might be used to help an employee write clearer, more concise reports. However, if a behavior or action was a one-time event, you might decide to let it go.

## Foster a receptive work environment for feedback

“ When people talk, listen completely.  
Most people never listen. ”  
—Ernest Hemingway

As a manager, you establish the tone, the feel, and even the culture for working in your group. Take advantage of this prerogative to adopt a broad and general acceptance that feedback is a mutually beneficial exchange.

You can achieve this attitude of mutual benefit toward feedback by:

- Basing feedback on clear and specific work expectations
- Establishing a mutual commitment between individuals or groups to work on areas that need improvement
- Acknowledging positive performance
- Framing feedback as an ongoing process—not as an occasional or arbitrary comment or correction

## Leadership Insight: Real-time feedback

Giving developmental feedback is something I think a lot of managers struggle with, and a lot of them aren't very good at it. I was lucky that early in my career I had somebody who was really good at it.

This fellow's name was Don, and he was my manager at a consulting firm that I worked with early on. I remember very distinctly the first time that he ever gave me any performance feedback. We were on our way back from a client meeting. We were in the car on the way to the airport to come home, and I was feeling like I was really ready now to let down now that the meeting was over.

He turned to me and said, "So, I have some feedback for you", and started to give me some feedback about things that I had done well and things that I could do better. And my initial

thought was, "Gee, I am not really in the mood for this feedback. We had a long tough meeting, I would soon just as wait and get it at another time."

But I thought, "Well, I'm a new kid on the block, he probably just wants to give me some quick feedback about how I am doing." And I didn't really expect I would get any more feedback like that, except maybe at my performance review time, because that is how my previous managers had operated.

The next time we went out to the client the same thing happened. We get back in the car on the way to the airport and Don turns to me and he says, "So here's my feedback for you." And that's when I realized that this was going to be a regular thing. That after every client meeting I was going to get feedback in the car on the way to the airport.

At first I wasn't very wild about that idea. But by the third or the fourth time that we did this it came to feel very natural, and it came to feel like a conversation as opposed to just a one-way conversation. It turned into a real dialogue about how I could develop and what assignments might be good for me in order to develop certain capabilities. I came to actually look forward to the conversations.

I also appreciated that probably one of the reasons that he chose this time to do it was because he knew that we would have uninterrupted time together. And so I started to save up the questions that I had, developmental issues that I wanted to talk to him about, and these conversations became a really important part of my development.

So I've tried to do that with other people that I manage over the years. And I've found that as long as those sessions are really predictable and they happen on a frequent basis, it makes them so much easier for everyone.

Offer frequent feedback to assist employee development, rather than saving comments for periodic performance reviews.

**Sharon Grady**  
**President, The Grady Company**

Sharon Grady is the President of The Grady Company, a consulting firm that provides executives with the communication and conflict-management skills that drive their success as leaders. She specializes in teaching individuals and teams to excel at the challenging conversations they typically avoid or manage ineffectively.

Before founding The Grady Company, Sharon was a consultant with Monitor and with Mercer Management Consulting, and served as Chief Operating Officer of Interaction Associates, a global provider of collaboration consulting and leadership education.

She previously worked on Capitol Hill as a staff aide to U.S. Senator Abraham Ribicoff, and as press secretary to U.S. Congresswoman Barbara Kennelly.

Sharon holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from Wesleyan University and a Master of Business Administration from Harvard Business School. She studied Advanced Negotiation at Harvard Law School, is a trained

mediator, and speaks fluent Spanish. Her Web site is [www.gradycompany.com](http://www.gradycompany.com).

## Example of giving feedback

Managers often give employees feedback to help them improve their skills or learn new ones. Notice how this manager gives clear and specific feedback that focuses on the employee's behavior and its impact on the team.

**Manager:** Next time—please be sure to give the writer detailed feedback on the first draft, so that major changes don't need to be made in the final draft. If you wait until the final, it means the writer has wasted his time—and our money—developing the wrong material. And it also means that all of us—the writer, you, and me—have to scramble at the end to meet our schedule.

It's also important for managers to provide positive feedback—to reinforce what someone is doing right. Here's the manager again—this time talking with another direct report following a meeting:

**Manager:** You did a great job of restating the issues in a neutral manner. Particularly since that meeting was so contentious.

**Direct Report:** Thank you. It wasn't easy. It was a bit like herding cats.

**Manager:** Well, you made it seem easy. You also did a good job of focusing the group on the issues at hand. Well done.

**Direct Report:** Well, I appreciate the feedback. Especially since it didn't feel that smooth while it was happening.

## Activity: Why is Jeff underperforming?

In order to provide effective feedback, you must be able to discern reasons for an employee's underperformance and decide how to address them.

Jeff is one of your direct reports in the accounting department. In the coming month, you will be seeing him for his twice-a-year performance appraisal. Jeff came highly recommended for his job, and he has fifteen years of experience in finance. However, you have found that his performance in the job has not been as high as you expected. You want to look into possible explanations for his underperformance before the appraisal.

Which of these is *not* a likely explanation for his underperformance?

☐ Low motivation

**Not the best choice.** Low motivation is always a potential explanation for underperformance, especially from a team member who you know to be capable of high performance.

☐ Inadequate assistance and resources

**Not the best choice.** Jeff has just started in this job after many years working elsewhere. Perhaps he is not getting the assistance necessary to adapt to your company's

processes, or perhaps the resources available to him are different from what he's used to.

- ☐ Lack of skills or experience

**Correct choice.** You already have enough information about Jeff's career background to rule out inadequate experience as a cause for his underperformance.

To explore possible reasons for Jeff's underperformance, you take a look at his self-assessment. Each employee completes a self-assessment a month prior to his or her performance appraisal meeting. In Jeff's self-assessment, he wrote that he often feels unsure about the correct procedures and processes to follow in his job.

Given this information, what would be the next step for looking into the reasons for Jeff's underperformance?

- ☐ Compare his performance against that of the rest of the accounting department

**Not the best choice.** Though this approach might yield some interesting information, it would not help you distinguish Jeff's performance from that of members of the staff who have been with the company long enough to know all the processes and procedures. For the most part, this approach will simply corroborate what you already know: Jeff is underperforming.

- ☐ Request that Jeff file additional weekly self-reports between now and his performance appraisal

**Not the best choice.** Direct reports may have good reasons for their areas of underperformance, but these should be expressed in their self-assessments. Asking them to report frequently on their own performance may be reasonable in some contexts, but in others, it will create paranoia and make it more difficult for you to track down the root causes of underperformance.

- ☐ Compare his performance against that of people who joined his department at roughly the same time

**Correct choice.** If Jeff is unclear about the processes and procedures he should follow in his job, there may be a training problem in his department. Comparing his performance to that of people who joined his department at about the same time might be instructive; if they are all underperforming to varying degrees, then the problem could very well be training.

You investigate how Jeff's performance holds up against that of other people who joined the accounting department at roughly the same time. You discover that performance among the members of this group is generally low, and that they all say, in their self-assessments, that they are having problems understanding processes and procedures.

Given this information, which item would be most useful to bring to Jeff's performance appraisal meeting?

- ☐ The training manual used for new members of the accounting department

**Correct choice.** Reviewing the training manual with Jeff might reveal that there are either great disparities between what's in the manual and what is actually being taught or that the training manual itself is inadequate.

- ☐ Performance records of direct reports who previously held Jeff's position

**Not the best choice.** The performance of these direct reports may have provided you with a basis of comparison; but you cannot share these reports with Jeff and their circumstances are different from Jeff's.

- ☐ Copies of the emails you received initially recommending Jeff for the position

**Not the best choice.** These recommendations are part of the reason that you believe Jeff is not performing to his full potential; however, they will not help you and Jeff determine why this is.

## Key Idea: Guidelines for effective feedback

### Key Idea

As you offer feedback, keep these guidelines in mind.

- Do not limit your feedback to poor performance. It is equally important to give affirming feedback that reinforces and recognizes what the recipient did right.
- To be constructive, make both positive and negative feedback very specific. Include the details: what happened, where and when, and who was involved.

For example, "Your charts and tables were excellent, but I noticed several severe typographical errors." Statements such as, "your report was a mixed success" are too broad to be useful. Saying "I was impressed by how well you supported your conclusions in this report, but I noticed some factual and typographical errors" is helpful feedback.

- Address the behaviors, not the person. Instead of saying that someone is inconsistent, state that he or she needs to proofread his or her reports more carefully.
- Describe the impact of the behavior on your work. For example, "When you turned in a substandard report, another team member had to stay late and correct your work."

If you have offered constructive feedback rather than praise, help the recipient to articulate goals and to describe his or her commitments to change. Do you want the person to come up with alternative behavior that would work better, or do you need to prescribe them? Ensure that any goals you agree upon are realistic, and that the person is committed to follow through on them.

Then, ensure that your employees recognize that you take their commitments to change seriously. Continue to check in to see how the recipient is doing, and whether he or she is making progress toward the agreed-upon goals. Offer any support you can provide.

Avoid the common pitfalls of offering feedback. Focus on these key guidelines.

## Be patient with noncommunicators

When you are dealing with quiet, shy, or uncommunicative people, slow the feedback process down. Start by speaking slowly yourself. Train yourself to take long pauses.

Most importantly, ask open-ended questions—questions that require a response.

For example, ask "What was your rationale for telling the customer we couldn't help him?" or "How exactly did you prepare for the presentation?"

Not only do these types of questions need responses other than "yes" or "no," but they show that you want to know more about the situation from the recipient's point of view. Asking these questions demonstrates that you are not just imposing your version of the problem, but are open to other interpretations.

Success in the workplace increasingly depends on being able to both work with, and learn from, others around you. Therefore, while knowing how to give feedback is critical, it is equally important to know how to receive it.

## Accept corrective feedback



While positive feedback is always welcome, corrective feedback is often more difficult to hear, accept, and act on. Even though, on some level, you may feel defensive about suggestions for improving your skills, attitudes, or productivity, being able to receive feedback with an open mind is just as important as being able to give it.

## Why do people feel defensive about feedback?



Dedicated professionals often tell themselves: "By now I should know it all! After all, I've worked hard, I'm highly skilled, and I'm committed to my work." Corrective feedback directed at you can make you feel that you've made a mistake, or that you've failed in some way. Failure can feel threatening to professionals who pride themselves on their high-quality work.

When professionals feel threatened, their defenses will likely rise. The result? Even the best feedback can bounce off a defensive wall and turn toward blaming another person.

## Prepare to receive feedback

“ In order that all men may be taught to speak the truth, it is necessary that all likewise should learn to hear it. ”  
–Samuel Johnson

If someone has offered to provide you formal feedback, do your best to prepare for the session. Work with the giver to pick a time and setting that works well for both of you. Try to hold your session in a private office or conference room that you feel comfortable in.

Confirm the specifics of the issue you will be discussing, and think through any relevant details beforehand. Gather data to present that supports your viewpoint. Mull over what questions you might be asked so that you will be prepared to respond without difficulty once the session has started.

Finally, decide what you want to get out of the session. What do you want to learn? While opening your mind to what you are told and acknowledging that you can learn from mistakes are critical factors when receiving feedback, the secret to success is actually wanting to learn from it.

## Key Idea: Tips for staying open during the feedback session

### Key Idea

When receiving feedback, keep the following six ideas in mind:

- **First, assess the source and the intent.** Is the giver really trying to help you, or is he or she reacting from anger?
- **Second, listen actively.** Concentrate on the giver's message and implications rather than on your response. Ask yourself these questions.
  - What are the events or situations that are being described?



- Where is the giver of the feedback placing emphasis or showing energy?
- What are the emotions being expressed by the giver of the feedback?
- What can you learn from the body language of the person?

With your own body language, show that you are listening carefully. If you listen passively or look disinterested, you may make the person giving you feedback angry.

- **Third, paraphrase what you hear.** For example, restate the feedback as, "What I hear you saying is . . ."
- **Fourth, ask questions when you don't understand.** It's helpful to ask open-ended questions—questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer—when you're unclear about some aspect of the feedback.

The following are some examples of open-ended questions:

- What exactly occurred?
  - How did you feel when that happened?
  - Can you explain that in greater detail?
- **Fifth, separate fact from opinion.** For example, if someone points out that your calculations are wrong, and then shows you how you made your mistake, that's a fact. If he or she instead says, "Your demeanor was intimidating," that's an opinion. While opinions should not be discounted, they do not always carry the same weight as established facts.
  - **And sixth, be attentive to suggestions you can act on.** Decide what you can learn from the feedback, and what you will be able to improve. Work with the giver to develop an action plan to which you can honestly commit.

It is critical that you remain open during the entire feedback session. Unless you can lower your defensive shield and really hear the feedback, the session will be a waste of time—for both you and the person taking the time to provide feedback.

You receive as well as give feedback. How can you use feedback others give you to do your job better?

## Behavioral typology



How you give or receive feedback is greatly influenced by your and the other person's job function, gender, race, and age, and by whether the feedback is being given up or down. Your preferred behavioral style, and that of the other person, will also affect the interaction.



Generally speaking, people are either task-oriented or people-oriented, and prefer to address challenging situations either directly or after mulling over them and/or discussing options with others. Based on these distinctions, behavioral experts have identified four basic types. They are: the director, who is task-oriented and focused on "getting things done"; the thinker, who is also task-oriented but focused on "getting things perfect"; the socializer, who is people-oriented, energetic and thrives on respect; and the relater, who is also people-oriented, but more concerned with belonging and "getting along with everyone."

The table below summarizes recommendations for your customizing feedback for these four basic types:

### Customizing Feedback According to Type

Type	Orientation	What They Seek	How to Work with Them
Director	Task-oriented, direct	Authority and control	Address the issues directly. Give them control in the feedback process.
Thinker	Task-oriented, indirect	Accuracy and precision	Approach the issues in a nonthreatening way. Give thinkers time to gather all the information they need and deliberate solutions.
Socializer	People-oriented, direct	Relationships and reputation	Make sure to give positives first. Emphasize collaboration when solving behavior or job-performance issues.

Relater	People-oriented, indirect	Affiliation and stability	Emphasize how feedback will help create a more stable and productive work environment. Give relaters information and ask them for their opinion.
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Differences can be handled more smoothly when you speak the same language. If the other person prefers directness, get to the point quickly. But if the other person prefers a more informal, conversational approach, begin the feedback session with an icebreaker like, "That was a tough project. We sure learned a lot."

Anticipate what might make you or the other person uncomfortable. For example, by bolstering a younger manager's confidence, a more senior manager may be able to make his colleague more receptive to feedback.

### Activity: Customize your feedback based on type

Being able to identify a person's behavioral type will help you choose how to phrase your feedback.

Based on the following employee profiles, decide into which behavior category each one falls.

Le is people-oriented and direct. He seeks out relationships and his reputation is important to him. Into which behavior category does Le fall?

- ☐ Director  
**Not the best choice.** Le is not a director because this type prefers to be task-oriented and direct.
- ☐ Thinker  
**Not the best choice.** Le is not a thinker because this type prefers precision and is task-oriented.
- ☐ Socializer  
**Correct choice.** Le is a socializer because he seeks out relationships and his reputation is important to him.
- ☐ Relater  
**Not the best choice.** Le is not a relater because this type tends to be indirect. Le is direct.

Laura is people-oriented and indirect. She seeks out affiliation and stability. She likes to get along with everyone. Into which behavior category does Laura fall?

☐ Director

**Not the best choice.** Laura is not a director because this type prefers to be task-oriented and direct.

☐ Thinker

**Not the best choice.** Laura is not a thinker because this type prefers precision and is task-oriented.

☐ Socializer

**Not the best choice.** Laura is not a socializer because while she is people-oriented, she is not direct.

☐ Relater

**Correct choice.** Laura is a relater because she tends to be people-oriented and indirect. Emphasize how feedback will help create a more stable and productive work environment. Give her information and ask her for her opinion.

Dee is task-oriented and direct. She seeks out authority and control. She likes to get things done. Into which behavior category does Dee fall?

☐ Director

**Correct choice.** Address the issues directly with Dee. Give her control in the feedback process.

☐ Thinker

**Not the best choice.** Dee is not a thinker because she is direct.

☐ Socializer

**Not the best choice.** Dee is not a socializer because while she is direct, she is not people-oriented.

☐ Relater

**Not the best choice.** Dee is not a relater because this type tends to be indirect. Dee is direct.

Courtney is task-oriented and indirect. She seeks out accuracy and precision and likes to get things "perfect." Into which behavior category does Courtney fall?

☐ Director

**Not the best choice.** Courtney is not a director because she does not prefer to be direct.

☐ Thinker

**Correct choice.** Approach issues with Courtney in a nonthreatening way. Give her time to gather all the information she needs and deliberate solutions.

☐ Socializer

**Not the best choice.** Courtney is not a socializer because she is not people-oriented.

☐ Relater

**Not the best choice.** Courtney is not a relater because while she prefers to be indirect, she is not people-oriented.

## Gauging feedback's impact



Receiving corrective feedback is difficult for many people, and, in many cases, receiving it from someone who is a direct report may be especially hard to hear. Therefore, think carefully before giving upward corrective feedback. Gauge the intended recipient's reaction and ensure that the matter warrants action before proceeding. Make sure the payoff of providing feedback to your boss is worth the risk of upsetting and/or alienating him or her.

## Before scheduling your meeting

The most important step to take after deciding to give feedback upward is to prepare very carefully. Plan how you will state the problem. Support your opinion with hard data such as notes, memos, job descriptions, events, and specific dates.

When you feel adequately prepared, make an appointment for a feedback session. Don't surprise your manager. Let him or her know that you want to discuss an important issue privately. Ask for a specific time and place to meet.

## During the meeting

When facilitating a corrective feedback session with your boss, take the following steps:

- **Describe the behavior and its impact on you and the team.** Depending on personalities and situations, you may want to begin in a friendly, upbeat manner. However, when you present the feedback, do so directly, simply, and accurately. Describe the behavior, not the personality. Avoid an accusing tone of voice. Be sure to specify the effect of the manager's behavior on the team's productivity.
- **Pay close attention to your supervisor's reactions.** Monitor body language. Is your supervisor becoming tense? Sitting back from you? Crossing his or her arms? These are signs of alienation. Ideally, your supervisor will be leaning toward you, nodding, and listening carefully—a sure sign that you are being heard.

The verbal response is the most important indicator of whether your boss understands the issue and is open to feedback—and to change. You can encourage a response by asking periodically, "Does this make sense?"

- **Make a suggestion or request.** Unless your conversation is going badly, move from a statement of the problem to a possible resolution. If your manager is ready to meet this challenge, he or she will likely join with you in considering options for improving the situation.
- **Check for agreement or commitment to change.** Even if the process seems to have gone well, make sure that you are both clear about the commitment. Before the session concludes, ask something like, "So we agree that both of us will focus on the top priorities?" Try to have your manager answer with a simple, "Yes." Finally, keep a record of the meeting, including the results.

## Overcoming obstacles



The barriers to giving and receiving feedback are many. Perhaps one of the most significant barriers is simply remaining open to feedback. Both giver and receiver need to be open—open to receiving feedback, open to giving it, and open to the possibility that the feedback being given may be based on incorrect assumptions. When both parties believe that the feedback has a positive intent, you can focus on the message. But before you focus on the message, you often have to work through some negative attitudes or associations.

## Barriers to giving feedback

You may find it difficult to give feedback because you:

- Believe that feedback is negative and unhelpful
- Worry that the other person will not like you
- Believe that the other person cannot handle the feedback
- Have had previous experiences in which the receiver didn't change or was hostile to feedback

- Feel the feedback isn't worth the risk

## Leadership Insight: Delivering difficult feedback

There are three important phases to delivering difficult feedback. And often managers do well with the first two but miss the third. The first phase is the positive frame. If you know you have some difficult feedback to deliver, you begin the conversation with a positive frame, letting your employee know what they are doing well, where they are being effective, which talents are appreciated.

Then there is the delivery of the difficult message, which should be done with respect but very directly, with detail, and in behavioral terms, being very specific about the types of behaviors that are problematic, rather than making it very personal ("You this, you that"). So the more behavioral you can be and descriptive, the more effective.

That's phase two.

Now, the third phase is the one that is often omitted. And it is what I call "normalization": making things normal again, reestablishing your relationship as a comfortable relationship where the employee can come to you with whatever type of content or issue and feel that he or she can share with you in a non-evaluative environment.

So, whether it is at the end of that feedback session, or whether it is the next day, when you're walking down the hall past that employee's office, make sure to finish with a normalizing response, such as, "I want to say again how really valuable I find your contributions to the team. I want to say how we really value your ability to write" or whatever that talent is.

Now, the next day, another normalizing move would be to drop by with some type of personal message: "How was your son's soccer game? What was the outcome? How are things going about this or about that?"

So, in the three phases, remember to begin with a positive frame, remember to be behaviorally specific when you deliver the difficult message, but remember to bring the relationship back to a normal, open relationship where your employee is comfortable continuing in that relationship with you.

Offer difficult feedback in three steps. First, articulate what the employee is doing well; second, provide specific input on problematic behaviors and, finally, re-connect with the employee on a personal level to normalize the relationship.

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Timothy Butler is a Senior Fellow and Director of Career Development Programs at Harvard Business School. His research interests focus on career decision making and the relationship between personality structure and work satisfaction.

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## Barriers to receiving feedback

Receiving corrective feedback may be difficult because you:

- Have the urge to rationalize, since the criticism can feel uncomfortable
- Believe that your self-worth is diminished by suggestions for improvement
- Have had previous experiences in which feedback was unhelpful or unjustified

You may even find receiving affirming feedback uncomfortable because you:

- Don't want to be set apart from others
- Feel others will be envious

Because feedback is based on interactions between at least two people, there are many moments when productive and honest communication could break down. One of the most common scenarios appears below:

These concerns are normal but easily countered through advance preparation. Feedback is worth the stress of preparing for a situation that may seem uncomfortable, because it is essential for the health of the organization.

## Activity: Overcoming barriers

Being aware of the different types of barriers to receiving feedback will help you to overcome them and be open to improving your own performance.

**Manager:** Maria, I wanted to talk with you about the team project you have been leading. You have been very thorough.

**Maria:** It was nothing.

**Manager:** You have done well at taking notes and following up with everyone to make sure their tasks are complete.

**Maria:** Oh, well. Anyone else would do the same thing I did.

What barrier is keeping Maria from receiving feedback openly?

- ☐ The urge to rationalize

**Not the best choice.** Maria does not try to "explain away" her good note-taking and follow-up.

- ☐ Belief that her self-worth is diminished by suggestions for improvement

**Not the best choice.** The feedback Maria received was actually positive, so she has not yet received any suggestions for improvement.

- ☐ Feels others will be envious

**Not the best choice.** It is not apparent that Maria is afraid others will be envious.

- ☐ Does not want to be set apart from others

**Correct choice.** Maria seems to dismiss this positive feedback, perhaps because she does not want to be seen as different from her peers.

**Manager:** Maria, I wanted to talk with you about the presentation you gave to the team. I think you would improve your effectiveness by adding some handouts of the technical data you covered.

**Maria:** I considered that, but I thought it would be distracting.

**Manager:** Your topic is fairly technical, and I think handouts would help the audience understand better what you are saying.

**Maria:** Well, I just thought that it would draw their attention away from me.

What barrier is keeping Maria from receiving feedback openly?

- ☐ The urge to rationalize

**Correct choice.** Maria tries to "explain away" why she did not provide handouts. Further, she does not seem to hear why this might be a good idea because she is too busy defending her choice.

- ☐ Belief that her self-worth is diminished by suggestions for improvement

**Not the best choice.** There is no indication that Maria's self-worth was damaged by the feedback.

- ☐ Feels others will be envious

**Not the best choice.** It is not apparent that Maria is afraid others will be envious.

- ☐ Does not want to be set apart from others

**Not the best choice.** Including handouts would not necessarily set Maria apart from others.



**Manager:** Maria, I wanted to talk with you about the proposal you and your team put together. It's apparent that you organized the team very well.

**Maria:** Thank you. But, everyone played a part in this proposal.

**Manager:** I recognize that. But I also know that you spent an extra 4 hours of personal time on the project. You are an excellent model for others on the team, and I'd like to reward you with a half-day of vacation.

**Maria:** You don't have to do that. I'm sure someone else would have stepped in if I hadn't. We don't have to make a big deal out of it. I don't want to make the others feel bad.

What barrier is keeping Maria from receiving feedback openly?

- ☐ The urge to rationalize

**Not the best choice.** Maria does not try to "explain away" the extra time she spent on the proposal.

- ☐ Belief that her self-worth is diminished by suggestions for improvement

**Not the best choice.** The feedback Maria received was actually positive, so she has not yet received any suggestions for improvement.

- ☐ Feels others will be envious

**Correct choice.** Maria does not want to be recognized over others for her efforts. It seems she is concerned that her teammates will be envious of her reward.

- ☐ Does not want to be set apart from others

**Not the best choice.** It is clear that the reason Maria does not want to be set apart is because she is afraid of making teammates envious of her reward.

## Key Idea: Affecting change

### Key Idea

Even though you may want to hear feedback and respond to it, some of the changes that feedback asks for are much easier to accomplish than others.

For example, feedback is more likely to affect learning and change in areas that least threaten a recipient's sense of self-worth.

Learning new job skills is usually the easiest type of change a person can make, whereas altering inherent personality characteristics is the most difficult.

Given these general tendencies, try to use feedback to enhance and improve an employee's:

- Job skills, such as learning a new computer program
- Time-management skills, like prioritizing tasks
- Work process, such as establishing a more logical routine
- Knowledge about a subject or organization, like learning new tax codes

On the other hand, use caution when giving feedback when a change is difficult for the person or beyond a person's control.

For example, asking a direct report to become more of a "people person," instead of addressing specific job behaviors that could be changed will likely prove ineffective.

Some behaviors are much easier to change than others. Learn which behaviors are most affected by feedback, and which should be left alone.

## Factors that make change difficult



The difficulty in making changes can be compounded by psychological factors as well as by aspects of the organizational culture. Such difficulties include:

- **A perceived lack of need.** For example, "I'll change to more of a take-charge person later, when I'm in charge. I don't need to be that way in my current position."
- **Lack of motivation.** For example, the person sees him- or herself in a job with no upward mobility.
- **Few or no negative consequences for negative behavior.** For example, leaving meetings early is not punished.
- **No rewards for positive behavior.** For example, checking all the facts before consulting a colleague is not acknowledged.

While personality changes are extremely difficult or impossible to effect, you may be able to change a person's attitudes or habits. However, even changing someone's attitude takes more of a commitment than a typical feedback process requires. Since this type of change does not occur overnight, feedback directed to this kind of change needs to be sustained over time. Generally speaking, continuous feedback focused on long-term learning and behavior change forms part of a coaching situation.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**How do I tell someone about personal habits that affect my work (e.g., talking to himself or herself, talking loudly on the phone)?**

Providing feedback here is similar to what you would use in most other situations. First, make sure not to get into a lengthy, involved conversation. In private, state your feedback in a neutral way, and allow the other person to deal with it. Make clear that your statement draws from your experience alone and that you are not speaking for the entire team.

### **How do I give feedback when a personal problem is affecting the person's work?**

Even when personal problems are affecting an employee, you still need to provide feedback. Acknowledge the personal problem and your intention to work with the employee. Keep your description factual. Listen to the reaction. If the person insists that the situation will improve only when his or her personal situation improves, explain the negative effect of the person's actions. Clearly detail your expectations for work performance and emphasize that they are not changed due to the employee's circumstances. Point out the negative impact of the employee's behavior on the team.

### **I have given feedback and I still see no change. What should I do?**

Examine why nothing seems to be happening. Does the person have control over the issue? Address the situation again. For example, approach them calmly by noting: "I know we have talked about this before, but it's still a problem. How do you see the situation?" If the person does have control over the issue and doesn't have a radically different view of the situation, then you should reiterate the need for the requested change to occur.

### **What if I don't agree with feedback I have received?**

You may want the giver's feedback at another time, so proceed diplomatically. Examine why you don't agree with the feedback. Make sure you are not just in denial about what she or he has said. Assume that the other's perception of the situation is true for him or her. Assess the impact if you do not use the advice given. If you do not plan to use the advice, you may choose not to speak to the giver of the feedback at all. However, if you work with him or her regularly, you will need to clearly explain your reasons for not acting on it.

### **What do I do if I receive unjustified criticism?**

Don't counterattack. Consider the source. After paraphrasing and checking what you have heard, explain what does not seem valid and see how the giver reacts.

### **I never receive feedback when I want it—only once it is too late. What do I do?**

Determine what kind of feedback you are looking for, and ask for it from a mentor or trusted colleague. For example, if you want to know how effective your memos are, find a colleague whose writing you admire. Describe the specific behaviors you want to receive comments on. Depending on the issue, you may need to wait for the mentor to have a chance to observe you in action before giving feedback.

### **I want to tell someone how I feel about his or her work, but the situation is over and cannot be changed. What should I do?**

You can still let them know how you feel and see if you can find a way to have it changed for next time. You can also make a suggestion about future behavior. For example, "Next time, you might consider this approach. . ."

## **Overview**

This section provides interactive exercises so you can practice what you've learned. These exercises are self-checks only; your answers will not be used to evaluate your performance in the topic.

## Scenario

Assume the role of a manager in a fictional situation and explore different outcomes based on your choices (5-10 minutes).

## Check Your Knowledge

Assess your understanding of key points by completing a 10-question quiz (10 minutes).

## Scenario: Part 1

### Part 1

As they pass in the hallway, Marianne, Isaac's manager, asks him to schedule some time "to chat" in the next week. When Isaac asks what she wants "to chat" about, Marianne says she can't talk because she's late, but not to worry. She just wants to give Isaac some feedback.

Now Isaac is worried.

A colleague, Lily, tells Isaac that anxiety over receiving feedback is normal. Lily suggests that Isaac might observe himself as he interacts with others—perhaps at home—to analyze how he *tends* to react to feedback. Then Isaac can think about how he wants to react. Lily offers to role-play some scenarios with Isaac. A few days later, they get together.

**Lily:** So, did you have any insights about how you tend to react to feedback?

**Isaac:** Yes, I did. I become defensive. At least I did last night. I won't go into the details.

**Lily:** Not uncommon. Do you have any idea what your "chat" with Marianne is about?

**Isaac:** None. I've thought about it. I drafted some recommendations for Marianne. I didn't know she was going to pass them on to her boss. Maybe they weren't, I don't know, clear enough or...

**Lily:** Okay, I'm Marianne. We've started our chat. "Isaac, you know those recommendations you drafted? I think you might have spent more time on them."

What should Isaac say in response to the feedback?

- "I would be glad to rewrite the recommendations."

### Not the best choice.

Isaac has jumped to the conclusion that the recommendations need to be rewritten, although Marianne (or Lily role-playing Marianne) did not say this. When receiving feedback, people often jump to conclusions—which can cause them to propose the wrong solution or take the wrong action.

Be sure to gather all the necessary information before you draw a conclusion and suggest a solution.

- "Actually, I spent a lot of time on them."

#### **Not the best choice.**

Isaac recognized that he tends to become defensive when receiving feedback, and this response is somewhat defensive. Isaac may well have spent a lot of time on the recommendations. But rather than defending himself, he should try to find out why Marianne thinks he should have spent more time. Focus on clearly understanding the message being delivered, rather than on defending yourself.

While it's important not to get defensive when receiving negative feedback, that doesn't mean you should accept the feedback without question. Rather, uncover the facts that are driving the feedback.

- "You're saying that I should have spent more time on them, because...?"

#### **Correct choice.**

Isaac is simply paraphrasing what Marianne said and asking for more information. He is focusing on the message to better understand what the problem is, rather than jumping to conclusions or defending his actions.

Open-ended questions (those that don't require only a yes or a no response) are a good way to probe for more information. Continue to ask questions and elicit more information until you clearly understand and can successfully paraphrase what the speaker said. Your goal is to remain open and calm, and to further the dialogue.

## **Scenario: Part 2**

### **Part 2**

**Lily:** When you're receiving feedback, it's easy to look back at something you did and become defensive. Or to look forward and offer a solution, jumping to some conclusion before you understand the problem. A good tactic is simply to focus on the message. You can even repeat what the speaker said and turn it into a question, such as: "You're saying that I should have spent more time on them, because...?"

Okay, I'm Marianne again. "Because... Well, Isaac, I don't think the recommendations were well thought out."

**Isaac:** What do you mean, not well thought out? That was clearly defensive. Let's see. Focus on the message...

How should Isaac continue?

- "I can see you don't agree with my conclusions. Which ones don't you agree with?"

**Not the best choice.**

Marianne may not agree with Isaac's conclusions. But what she actually said was that he didn't think they were "well thought out." Conceivably, Marianne might agree with the conclusions but think that Isaac should have supported them better. Isaac should listen carefully to what Marianne said, and respond to that.

Also, Marianne is expressing her opinion—what she thinks. Isaac needs to separate opinion from fact, and find out what the facts are.

- "You think my recommendations weren't well thought out. What specifically makes you think that?"

**Correct choice.**

When responding to feedback, carefully separate fact from opinion. In Marianne's statement "I don't think they were well thought out," the words "I think" signal that this is an opinion. Marianne's opinion may or may not be well founded. But it's more important that Isaac understand why she has this opinion.

- "Let's go over the recommendations together and see if we can improve them."

**Not the best choice.**

Isaac is accepting Marianne's opinion that the recommendations are not well thought out, before understanding why Marianne arrived at this conclusion. He is also offering a solution to the problem before clarifying what the problem is.

Always uncover the facts first. You may discover that there is no problem after all. Remain open to feedback, but don't automatically accept that you've done something wrong without first understanding the reasoning behind the feedback.

## Scenario: Part 3

### Part 3

**Lily:** Listen carefully. Respond to what is said. Probe for clarity. Be sure to separate opinions from facts, and establish what the facts are. A good response would be: "You think my recommendations weren't well thought out. What specifically makes you think that?"

Okay, I'm Marianne again. "I think that because there's more information you might consider—such as some market research that's been done in the area."

**Isaac:** Oh really?

What might Isaac say now?

- "Well, let me look over the market research and see if it changes any of my recommendations."

**Correct choice.**

Now that Isaac has established the facts and clarified Marianne's feedback, it's best to decide what he can learn from the feedback and determine next steps. Regardless of whether Marianne should have thought to tell Isaac about the market research ahead of time or Isaac should have thought to look for it himself, it's clear that additional information exists that may, or may not, change Isaac's recommendations.

By agreeing to review the market research he overlooked, Isaac demonstrates that he is open to acting on Marianne's feedback. In addition, this experience has likely taught him a valuable lesson for the future: it's best to seek out as much relevant information as possible before making recommendations.

- "I didn't know about the market research you've seen. Given the information I had at the time, I think the recommendations were sound."

**Not the best choice.**

This response is defensive. Rather than spending time defending his past actions and justifying the recommendations he made, Isaac should instead focus on the future and try to learn from Marianne's feedback. Now that Isaac clearly understands the reasons behind Marianne's feedback, he should work with her to determine next steps and devise a plan for avoiding similar situations in the future.

- "Thanks for letting me know about the market research. But why didn't you tell me about it earlier? I'm sure my recommendations would have been more complete had I known it existed."

**Not the best choice.**

While Isaac begins by thanking Marianne, his response is defensive overall. Rather than blaming Marianne for past actions (failing to inform him that the market research existed) and justifying the recommendations he made, Isaac should instead focus on the future and try to learn from Marianne's feedback. Now that Isaac clearly understands the reasons behind Marianne's feedback, he should work with her to determine next steps and devise a plan for avoiding similar situations in the future.

## Scenario: Conclusion

### Conclusion

The day of the "chat" with Marianne approaches. Isaac has thought about how he tends to react to feedback and has practiced with Lily. He can now approach the meeting with a bit less apprehension and a better chance of learning from the feedback.

If feedback is well intended and the person offering it sincerely wants to help, then receiving feedback is an opportunity to learn. In Isaac's case, it's a chance to change his typically defensive response into a probing response, to see what he might learn.

What was the "chat" about? Marianne wanted to tell Isaac how impressed both she and her boss were with Isaac's recommendations.

Not all feedback is bad.

## Activity: Check Your Knowledge: Question 1

Feedback is the sharing of observations about job performance or work-related behaviors. Which of the following *best* describes the recommended directions in which feedback can be productive?

- Downward (to a direct report) and laterally (with a colleague)

**Not the best choice.**

Downward and laterally are not the only directions in which feedback can be productive. Feedback can work in all directions to enable the parties involved to achieve work objectives: downward (to a direct report), laterally (with a colleague), *and* upward (to your boss). No matter what the direction, it's important to base feedback on clear work expectations.

- Downward, to a direct report

**Not the best choice.**

Downward is not the only direction in which feedback can be productive. Feedback can work in all directions to enable the parties involved to achieve work objectives: downward (to a direct



report), laterally (with a colleague), *and* upward (to your boss). No matter what the direction, it's important to base feedback on clear work expectations.

- Upward (to your boss), downward, and laterally

**Correct choice.**

Feedback can effectively be given in different directions—upward, downward, and laterally—to achieve work objectives. No matter what the direction, it's important to base feedback on clear work expectations.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 2

Doing your homework *before* giving feedback makes a difference. As you plan a feedback session, keep in mind the receiver's perspective on the issue you'll be addressing. Which of the following are the *most critical* sources of difference in perspective between the giver and the receiver of feedback?

- Intuition and emotional state

**Not the best choice.**

While your intuition and emotional state may influence the way you conduct your feedback session, being alert to differences between you and the other person in terms of race, gender, age, or communication style is more critical as you're planning a feedback session. Such differences can cause people to have different perspectives on the issue raised during the session.

In addition to considering these differences before delivering feedback, establish the "what" (issue) you are giving feedback about and the "why" or "so what" of the feedback. For example: "I'm concerned that the delay could affect the dates set for the client review. That could affect how the client thinks of you in the future."

- Race, gender, age, and communication style

**Correct choice.**

It pays to be alert to ways in which differences in gender, race, age, and communication styles may create different perspectives on an issue discussed during a feedback session. In addition to considering each of these factors before giving feedback, establish the "what" (issue) you are giving feedback about and the "why" or "so what" of the feedback. For example: "I'm concerned that the delay could affect the dates set for the client review. That could affect how the client thinks of you in the future."

- Personal involvement and respect between the individuals

**Not the best choice.**

While your personal involvement with and respect for the other person may influence the way you conduct your feedback session, being alert to differences between you and the other person in terms of race, gender, age, or communication style is more critical as you're planning a

feedback session. Such differences can cause people to have different perspectives on the issue raised during the session.

In addition to considering these differences before delivering feedback, establish the "what" (issue) you are giving feedback about and the "why" or "so what" of the feedback. For example: "I'm concerned that the delay could affect the dates set for the client review. That could affect how the client thinks of you in the future."

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 3

You are meeting with your boss to receive feedback on a project you just completed. Which of her following comments represents the most helpful feedback?

- "Your packaging design for this product is unworkable. Let's go over the specifics of how you can improve it."

**Not the best choice.**

This feedback is based on opinion ("the design is unworkable"), not fact. The correct answer is the statement based on fact: "You've miscalculated the formula used to size the market for our product. Let me show you where you've made your mathematical mistake." Because this feedback is based on a fact (there was a mathematical error in a formula), it is more helpful than a comment based on opinion alone. When receiving feedback, try to separate fact from opinion. While opinions should not necessarily be discounted, they do not carry the same weight as established facts.

- "You've miscalculated the formula used to size the market for our product. Let me show you where you've made your mathematical mistake."

**Correct choice.**

This feedback is based on a fact—there was a mathematical error in a formula—and therefore is more helpful than a comment based on opinion alone. When receiving feedback, try to separate fact from opinion. While opinions should not necessarily be discounted, they do not carry the same weight as established facts.

- "I don't think our customers will respond to the language you've used in the product brochure. Let me show you what I think would be more appropriate for this audience."

**Not the best choice.**

This feedback is based on opinion ("I don't think our customers will respond"), not fact. The correct answer is the statement based on fact: "You've miscalculated the formula used to size the market for our product. Let me show you where you've made your mathematical mistake." Because this feedback is based on a fact (there was a mathematical error in a formula), it is more helpful than a comment based on opinion alone. When receiving feedback, try to separate fact from opinion. While opinions should not necessarily be discounted, they do not carry the same weight as established facts.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 4

Feedback is not always easy to give or receive. Both the giver and the recipient need to be open in general, and they must acknowledge one possibility in particular. Which of the following should both giver and receiver be ready to accept?

- The feedback may be based on incorrect assumptions.

**Correct choice.**

It *is* always possible that the evidence on which the feedback is based is not correct. That's one of the benefits of having a feedback session: You can identify and correct any erroneous assumptions.

- The feedback session may damage your personal relationship.

**Not the best choice.**

When both giver and receiver have positive intentions during a feedback session, it's unlikely that the feedback will damage their personal relationship.

However, it *is* always possible that the evidence on which the feedback is based is not correct. That's one of the benefits of having a feedback session: You can identify and correct any erroneous assumptions.

- Misguided actions based on faulty conclusions might result.

**Not the best choice.**

Though faulty conclusions may result from feedback, this isn't the one particular possibility that both parties should keep uppermost in their minds during a feedback session.

The correct answer is "The feedback may be based on incorrect assumptions." After all, it *is* always possible that the evidence on which the feedback is based is not correct. That's one of the benefits of having a feedback session: You can identify and correct any erroneous assumptions.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 5

Often feedback calls for *change* in the giver or the receiver. Experts have learned that some changes are easier to accomplish than others. Which of the following is the *most difficult* to change?

- Job skills

**Not the best choice.**

Job skills are the easiest thing to change through feedback, not the most difficult. Personality is the most difficult to change. Attitude lies somewhere in between job skills and personality in terms of how hard it is to change.

- **Personality characteristics**

**Correct choice.**

Personality characteristics are more difficult to change than either attitude or job skills.

Job skills are the easiest to change, especially through additional coaching or training. Changing someone's attitude is more difficult than helping him or her to build new skills or gain new knowledge. Still, attitude change is easier than trying to alter someone's personality.

- **Attitude**

**Not the best choice.**

Attitude is not the most difficult thing to change through feedback; personality is. Job skills are the easiest to change (through coaching or training) and personality characteristics are the most difficult; attitude falls somewhere in between skills and personality in terms of how hard it is to change.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 6

Suppose you've just received feedback you don't agree with. Which is the *best* course of action to follow in this situation?

- **Carefully examine why you don't agree. Assume that the other person's perception of the situation is true for him or her. Before responding, consider whether you plan to use the advice.**

**Correct choice.**

Examine why you don't agree with the feedback. Honestly assess whether you are unreasonably denying what the other person has said. Then consider the impact of speaking up. Because you may want this person's feedback again at another time, it is best to proceed diplomatically.

If you don't plan to take the advice, and you interact with the other person regularly, you do need to explain why you are not going to act on the feedback. However, if you don't work with the person routinely, you may simply decide not to respond.

- **Politely ask for the evidence supporting the feedback. Then offer evidence supporting your view of the situation.**

**Not the best choice.**

Exchanging evidence is not the best course of action to follow. You will appear to be argumentative rather than receptive to feedback. Instead, carefully examine why you don't agree. Honestly assess whether you are unreasonably denying what the other person has said. Then consider the impact of speaking up. Because you may want this person's feedback again at another time, it is best to proceed diplomatically.

If you don't plan to take the advice, and you interact with the other person regularly, you do need to explain why you are not going to act on the feedback. However, if you don't work with the person routinely, you may simply decide not to respond.

- Wait until all the feedback has been given. Consider whether the other person has a distorted view of the situation. Then calmly summarize the points you disagree with.

#### **Not the best choice.**

This is not the best course of action to follow, because you will appear to be discounting the other person's perspective. Instead, carefully examine why you don't agree. Honestly assess whether you are unreasonably denying what the other person has said. Then consider the impact of speaking up. Since you may want this person's feedback again at another time, it is best to proceed diplomatically.

If you don't plan to take the advice, and you interact with the other person regularly, you do need to explain why you are not going to act on the feedback. However, if you don't work with the person routinely, you may simply decide not to respond.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 7

What is the first step you should take when planning to give feedback upward?

- Decide whether the payoff is worth the risk

#### **Correct choice.**

Some supervisors find it threatening to receive feedback from direct reports. Before scheduling a formal feedback session with your boss, verify that the issue on the table is worth addressing. Make sure the problem is severe enough and that the potential change is worth the risk of offending or alienating your boss.

- Gather all the information you need to support your feedback

#### **Not the best choice.**

While gathering information is critical to giving upward feedback effectively, it's not the first step you should take. Instead, you must first decide whether the payoff of delivering feedback is worth the risk.

Some supervisors find it threatening to receive feedback from direct reports. Before scheduling a formal feedback session with your boss, verify that the issue on the table is worth addressing. Make sure the problem is severe enough and that the potential change is worth the risk of offending or alienating your boss.

- Make an appointment ahead of time

#### **Not the best choice.**

While making an appointment to deliver feedback is critical to giving upward feedback effectively, it's not the first step you should take. Instead, you must first decide whether the payoff of delivering feedback is worth the risk.

Some supervisors find it threatening to receive feedback from direct reports. Before scheduling a formal feedback session with your boss, verify that the issue on the table is worth addressing.

Make sure the problem is severe enough and that the potential change is worth the risk of offending or alienating your boss.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 8

What is the *best* way to deliver feedback to someone who is shy or quiet?

- Ask open-ended questions that don't require a "yes" or "no" response

**Correct choice.**

Asking open-ended questions can stimulate the other person to respond with detailed answers. And when you have more detailed answers, you can more easily craft an action plan on which you can both agree. Examples of open-ended questions include: "What was your rationale for telling the customer we couldn't help him?" or "How exactly did you prepare for the presentation?" In addition to stimulating conversation, open-ended questions show that you want to know more about the situation from the recipient's point of view and that you're open to perspectives other than your own.

- Deliver feedback at whatever pace you desire, but be prepared to repeat yourself several times

**Not the best choice.**

Repeating yourself several times may make the other person pressured for a quick response and may cause him or her to become even quieter. Instead, ask open-ended questions. Examples include: "What was your rationale for telling the customer we couldn't help him?" or "How exactly did you prepare for the presentation?"

Open-ended questions can stimulate the other person to respond with detailed answers. And when you have more detailed answers, you can more easily craft an action plan on which you can both agree. Open-ended questions also show that you want to know more about the situation from the recipient's point of view and that you're open to perspectives other than your own.

- If the person remains silent, press him or her for responses. Don't leave the conversation until you have all the details from the recipient's perspective.

**Not the best choice.**

Pressuring the other person may cause him or her to become even quieter. Instead, ask open-ended questions. Examples include: "What was your rationale for telling the customer we couldn't help him?" or "How exactly did you prepare for the presentation?"

Open-ended questions can stimulate the other person to respond with detailed answers. And when you have more detailed answers, you can more easily craft an action plan on which you can both agree. Open-ended questions also show that you want to know more about the situation from the recipient's point of view and that you're open to perspectives other than your own.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 9

Your preferred work style and that of the other person can affect the giving and receiving of feedback. Imagine that your orientation is direct and task oriented. Jake, to whom you plan to give feedback, is also direct, yet he is more people oriented than task oriented. As you provide Jake with feedback, which of these approaches might work best?

- **Convey positives first. Emphasize collaboration and focus on addressing a behavior or job performance issue.**

**Correct choice.**

Jake seems to be a "socializer," someone who is people oriented and direct. He may care deeply about relationships and reputation.

You might make him more comfortable in receiving feedback by speaking his language. Convey positives and focus on relationships and collaboration rather than concentrating on details.

- **Address issues directly. Give Jake authority and control in the feedback process.**

**Not the best choice.**

Addressing issues directly and offering control in the feedback process works best for a "director"—someone who prefers being task oriented and direct.

However, for a people-oriented, direct "socializer" like Jake, conveying positives first and emphasizing collaboration to solve behaviors or performance issues would be ideal. Using his language during your feedback session will ensure optimal results.

- **Approach Jake in a nonthreatening way. Give him time to gather all the information needed and to explore solutions.**

**Not the best choice.**

Approaching issues in a nonthreatening way and giving people time to explore solutions works best for task-oriented, indirect "thinkers."

However, for a people-oriented, direct "socializer" like Jake, conveying positives first and emphasizing collaboration to solve behaviors or performance issues would be ideal. Using his language during your feedback session will ensure optimal results.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 10

Both feedback and performance evaluations focus on an employee's work and behavior. In what way does a formal feedback session *differ* from a performance evaluation?

- **One involves a face-to-face meeting; the other is a written review.**

**Not the best choice.**

Feedback sessions and performance evaluations can both involve a face-to-face meeting. But they differ in terms of purpose. The point of a performance evaluation is to review an employee's

past work, while the emphasis of a feedback session is on the future and how the employee can grow in a positive direction.

- One involves looking at the past; the other looks toward the future.

**Correct choice.**

During a performance evaluation, a supervisor reviews a direct report's past work. During a feedback session, the focus is on the future and how the employee can grow.

- One is between two people; the other includes a whole team.

**Not the best choice.**

Feedback sessions and performance evaluations involve individuals, not whole teams. But they differ in terms of purpose. The point of a performance evaluation is to review an employee's past work, while the emphasis of a feedback session is on the future and how the employee can grow in a positive direction.

## Check Your Knowledge: Results

# Your score:

## Steps for giving feedback to correct a behavior

Use this guide when speaking with either a colleague or a direct report.

1. **Make sure the work expectations and performance objectives are clear.**
2. **Verify that you have all the details you need.**
  - Take notes at the time of the incident.
  - Review job description, memos, and documented conversations of expectations that relate to the specific behavior.
  - Outline what behavior you want changed and the time frame.
  - Determine how you can support the change.
3. **Set up a conversation that will include the other person's input.**
  - Give the person advance notice that you want to give feedback.

For example, "I'd like to speak with you later about the accuracy of your numbers for our annual budget."

- Let the person know whether the solutions are open to discussion or whether you have specific requests that you need addressed.

For example, "Please come prepared to discuss how we can have accurate budget numbers ready by next Wednesday."

4. **Start off in an upbeat manner.**
  - Set the tone of the session as one of mutual sharing.



- If you can do so sincerely, mention something positive about the person's behavior. You can also acknowledge the positive intention of the person's behavior, even if the result was problematic.

**5. Describe the behavior and its impact on you and others.**

- Referring to the context, state who, what, and when.

For example, "When we compiled our departmental numbers for this year, the figures you gave us were unsubstantiated. We had agreed that we needed backup data for all numbers."

- State the concrete effect on you and others of the behavior.

For example, "We needed those cost-of-sales numbers for our presentation, and we all had to pitch in to get your side ready."

**6. Listen actively to each response.**

- Ask open-ended questions.

For example, "What's your reaction? What am I missing?"

- Check for the receiver's understanding to see if your perceptions are accurate.

For example, "What questions do you have that could help you understand what I am suggesting?"

- Check for agreement/disagreement. Encourage the other person to question, challenge, or make an alternate suggestion.

For example, "Is there anything about the suggestion that seems incorrect?"

- Inquire about the root causes, if appropriate.

For example, "What was it that led you not to provide the backup data?" Or, "What were you trying to achieve by reworking the budget?"

**7. Make a suggestion or request, and then check for understanding.**

For example, "What I'd suggest in the future is that if you believe you have a valid reason for not showing the data, make it clear and check to see that others see it the same way."

Next, request that the receiver do one or more of the following:

- Stop a behavior you find disruptive.
- Act in a way you think would be helpful.
- Acknowledge the behavior and its impact.

Check for the receiver's understanding of the suggestion/request.

For example, "What questions do you have about my concern or what I'm suggesting?"

**8. Check for agreement/commitment on next steps.**

- If you intend to have the person help you determine follow-up action, state it at this time.

For example, "We have another proposal that we are getting ready for next month. How can we approach this so that we have the final numbers in time?"

- Describe how you can support the corrected behavior.

For example, "I can make myself available for consultation about the budget numbers this Thursday."

- Keep a record of what was said and any agreement made.
- Keep track of milestones and check on their completion. If they are not met, consider a follow-up feedback session.

## Steps for communicating positive feedback

### 1. Before giving the feedback, make sure that you are the best person to give it.

Would the receiver be more receptive if the feedback came from a different person?

### 2. Describe the specific behavior or performance you want to encourage.

### 3. Explain how his or her effort has benefited you and the team.

### 4. Support the receiver in accepting the praise and taking credit.

For example, "Do you see how important your contribution is? It's your kind of helpful attitude that I really respect and that will help all of us learn from each other and enjoy our work at the same time."

If others helped, acknowledge them as well. This adds to the credibility of the praise.

For example, "I know that the support staff made a terrific contribution in helping you arrange the meetings."

### 5. Summarize before you close.

Thank the receiver for the good work—and don't send a mixed message by going on to discuss other issues.

## Steps for receiving feedback

### 1. Agree to a time and place for the session that will help you feel at ease and enable you to concentrate on the feedback.

### 2. Plan how you will be open to the feedback.

- If you think you might get upset, consider strategies for staying calm.
- Focus on what you want to learn from the feedback and write those objectives down.
- Separate the person giving the feedback from the feedback itself.

### 3. Stay open to the feedback given.

- Resist the urge to justify your behavior.
- Take notes if this helps you focus on what is being said.
- Work hard at understanding the other person's point of view.
- Use active listening techniques, such as rephrasing what you've heard or asking questions for clarification.

### 4. Clarify the context from your perspective.

- If necessary, provide a differing description of the event, or offer details that the giver doesn't have.

For example, "Let me tell you what led me to include the amount of detail I did and get your reactions. I wanted to include as much information as possible so that team members could later refer to that detail."

- Keep in mind that the purpose of the feedback is to improve your job performance.

**5. Decide what you can learn from the feedback.**

Don't overreact; consider the feedback and requests.

- Assess the giver's intention and the validity of the feedback. Does the giver want to work with you to help you improve? Does the giver have any direct control over your work? Have you heard this feedback before, from someone else? And if you decide not to accept the giver's recommendations, politely explain your rationale. Be prepared for consequences if this is an important issue or a critical part of your job.
- Does this person have knowledge about the situation?
- What facts can you agree on?
- What can you improve for next time?

**6. Consider your options for responding, then decide on an action.**

You can:

- Accept the request
- Decline the request.

Make a counteroffer or amendment. Remember: Feedback is not always given in priority order. Your job in the feedback process is to identify the most important issues first. Express understanding, but don't commit to changing. Be aware of the possible consequences.

For example, "I understand that you'd like me to rewrite this report for practice, but what I don't want to do is commit to something that I don't believe I'll be able to complete. My deadlines for the next month would seem to take priority. What I can do is to write a report using this input on this new project."

If no recommendation is given, request an alternative to the behavior.

For example, "What would you like me to do next time?"

**7. Describe your commitment and time frame.**

Include the reasoning behind what you believe you cannot accomplish.

**8. Thank the other person for the feedback, and ask for his or her support in helping you achieve the goal.**

For example, "I can follow through on your request to let you know backup for numbers. Thanks for the feedback."

## Tips for when to give feedback

- You notice an individual has accomplished a goal successfully.
- You're concerned that someone's behavior or performance is impeding progress toward team goals.
- Someone's actions or behavior have affected you personally and interfered with building a good working relationship.

## Tips for when not to give feedback

- You're too emotional to give it.
- The other person is too emotional to receive it.
- You do not have enough evidence.
- You just want to vent your feelings and are not interested in building relationships.
- The setting or time available is inadequate for a meaningful exchange.
- You're not prepared to receive feedback.

## Tips for giving effective feedback

- Be direct, but sensitive to the other person's style.
- State the feedback from the perspective of the receiver.
- Focus on job performance and on issues that can be changed in the future.
- Provide the data and reasoning that led you to your conclusions, so that the receiver can understand their validity or correct incorrect assumptions.
- Make sure to confirm the behavior and its impact before moving to corrective action.
- When giving feedback upward, ask for permission to give the feedback and let the person know about any specific requests you'd like to address during the feedback session.

## Tips for giving feedback in a volatile situation

- Rehearse how you will respond to excited outbursts. Practice how you will refocus the other person.
- Write down your points, so you can refer to them when things get rough.
- Speak slowly and calmly.
- Focus on just the work-related facts.
- Avoid comments that could be misconstrued as judgmental.
- Work on building small agreements about the basic details, what happened, when, etc.
- Keep the feedback simple—limit yourself to one or two issues per session.

## Tips for giving feedback to uncommunicative people

- Rehearse how you will respond if there is no reaction.
- Practice speaking slowly and taking long pauses.
- Make it clear that you expect a reply—and are willing to wait for one.
- Ask open-ended questions that help the person articulate his or her thoughts.

## Tips for responding to vague feedback

- Ask open-ended questions to clarify feedback.

For example, "What specifically made my presentation ineffective?"

- Don't let your frustration show. Keep your voice even and calm, and use body language—for example, direct eye contact and uncrossed arms—to show that you are open to receiving more information.

- Don't settle until you have the details that you need.

For example, "I'm still unclear about why my presentation was ineffective. Could you please give me more specifics?" Or, "So that I don't make wrong assumptions, can you give me some specifics?"

## Planning a feedback session worksheet

<i>Planning a Feedback Session Worksheet</i>
<i>Use this tool to prepare for a feedback session.</i>
Name the issue or behavior that needs to be corrected or reinforced.
What is the organizational and personal significance of this issue?
What is the purpose of the feedback?
What details (who, what, when) do you have to describe the behavior accurately?
What is the impact of the behavior?
What results do you want to produce?
Who is the best person to give the feedback and why?
What communication style will be the most effective and why?
Describe possible barriers to giving this feedback. What can you do to overcome them?
What behavior on the other person's part would be more constructive? Why?

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## Giving feedback upward assessment

<i>Giving Feedback Upward Assessment</i>
<i>Use this tool to determine whether the payoff of giving feedback upwards is worth the risk.</i>
What is the problem?
What could be reasonable intentions for the other person's actions?
How does it impact you?
Will this problem resolve itself or do you need to intervene?
How open is this person to your feedback?
What are the possible negative consequences to giving feedback?
If the problem is resolved, how will your and others' jobs be easier?
If the problem is not resolved, what will the consequences be?
Given the information you gathered above, is the payoff worth the risk?

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## Planning commitment worksheet

<i>Planning Commitment Worksheet</i>
<i>Use this tool after you have agreed to feedback you have received. Once you have planned your commitment, consider sharing it with the giver of the feedback for consideration.</i>
Describe your commitment.
What is the time frame?
How will you achieve this commitment?
How will this commitment help you obtain your goal?
What might interfere with your meeting this commitment?
What support and resources do you need?
How sure are you that you can follow through on this commitment? (Rate 1–10, 10 is absolutely sure).

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## Feedback process evaluation

<i>Feedback Process Evaluation</i>		
<i>Use this form after you have given feedback to determine what part of the results, relationship, and process worked well and what areas could be changed or improved upon.</i>		
Topic	What worked?	What could be changed or improved?
<b>Results</b>		
Impact of changes		
Timeliness of changes		
Expectations met		
Action plan followed		
<b>Process</b>		
Planning for the meeting		
Setting the beginning of the meeting up for success		
Having a clear and logical process		
Developing a realistic action plan		
<b>Relationship</b>		
Communication style		
Reaction to the feedback		
Level of trust		
Level of mutual respect and learning		

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## Why Develop Others?

“At the end of the day, you bet on people, not strategies.”

Larry Bossidy

Former CEO, AlliedSignal

In today's global business environment, markets and regulations change quickly. Competitors constantly innovate. Technological changes are the norm.

In order to outmaneuver the competition and meet the demands of the moment, organizations must be agile. They must execute flawlessly. And they must transform themselves continuously.

Are your leaders ready?

Dr. Noel M. Tichy

Professor

University of Michigan Ross School of Business

We have now entered an era where I don't care what industry you're in, you need leaders who can make decisions, make judgment calls at every single level. All the way down to the interface with the customer.



If you go to a company like Google or any of the high tech companies, a lot of the innovation that Amazon does is happening right at the front line. Go ahead, try it, put it out there, we'll learn from it. That cannot happen if the senior leadership doesn't have a commitment to both develop the leadership capability, but develop the business through engaging people at all levels of the organization.

### Becoming a teaching organization

I like to tell parents that they cannot delegate their responsibility to develop their children. And I think it is the same in an organization. Day in and day out the person that has the biggest impact on people in the organization is the next level above and the associates around and below. And so to build a learning organization I say is not enough. Learning could be, you know we are learning cooking, we are learning this or that, but teaching organizations, when I learned something, I have a responsibility to teach my colleagues.

So everybody takes responsibility for generating new knowledge and it is not enough to be a learner, you then have to translate it into teaching.

### The Virtuous Teaching Cycle

The role of a leader is to ensure that the people who work for them and around them are better every day. There's only one way to make people better. It's to teach them, learn from them, create what I call "virtuous teaching cycles", not command and control.

A virtuous teaching cycle is teach learn, teach learn. And the leader has a responsibility for reducing the hierarchy, for having a point of view to start the discussion, but then to be responsible to hear everyone's voice, get everyone involved in a disciplined way. It is not a free for all. But it is the leader's responsibility to create that virtuous teaching cycle.

A wonderful example of virtuous teaching cycle is the program that Roger Enrico ran at Pepsi, where every one of the 10 vice presidents comes with a business project.

Roger Enrico gets smarter as result of five days with 10 vice presidents, because he's learning from them. He needs to lower the hierarchy. He needs to be open to learning. And in turn, the people participating need to be energized and empowered to come up and engage in problem solving.

Another example is at Best Buy, where every morning in the stores you would bring 20 associates or so together and they would review the profit and loss statement from the day before, what we learned from the different customer segments in our stores, what we can do to improve our performance this day. And they do that every single day. The store manager was learning mostly from the associates on the floor.

That was a virtuous teaching cycle were everybody is teaching everybody, everybody is learning and the result has been an incredible result at Best Buy.

"The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership."

- Harvey S. Firestone

Founder, Firestone Tire and Rubber Co

There are clear advantages to leader-led development.

But for many leaders, taking on teaching, coaching, and other development responsibilities can seem daunting. You might avoid taking on these roles due to lack of time, resources, or your own lack of comfort with this role.

The following tips and resources can help you impart valuable learning to your team every day.

To develop others...

- Start with a Teachable Point of View

The first requirement of being able to develop other leaders is to have what I call a teachable point of view. I often give the example of, if I ran a tennis camp and you just came to day one of the tennis camp, I better have a teachable point of view on how I teach tennis. So you are standing there looking at me and it has got four elements. One, the ideas, well how do I teach the backhand, the forehand, the serve, rules of tennis. Then if I am a good tennis coach, I have a set of values. What are the right behaviors I want, how do I want you to dress, how do I want you to behave on the tennis court.

But if that's all I have, what do I do? Show you a power point presentation and then expect you to hit 500 backhands, 500 serves, run around for eight hours. I have to have a teachable point of view on emotional energy. How do I motivate you to buy in to the ideas and values?

On one end of the spectrum it could be I threaten you with corporal punishment, the other I can give you stock options, I can make you feel good about yourself, I can help you develop as a human being, what motivates you.

And then finally, how do I make the tough judgment calls, the yes/no, decisions as the tennis coach, the ball is in, the ball is out. I don't hire consultants and set up a committee, it is yes/no. And the same with running a business, what are the products, services, distribution channels, customer segments that are going to grow top line growth and profitability of the organization.

What are the values that I want everyone in the organization to have, how do I emotionally energize thousands of people, and then how do I make the yes/no, judgments on people and on business issues. So the fundamental building block of being able to develop other leaders is to have that teachable point of view just like the tennis coach.

To develop others...

- Lead with questions

Questions are hugely important because you want to create dialogue and again, what I call a virtuous teaching cycle where the teacher learns from the students and vice versa. Which means everybody ought to be free to ask whatever is on their mind, whatever it will take to get clarity and understanding, but it is not the leader just coming in and freeform asking questions. I believe the leader has a responsibility for framing the discussion, for having as best they can a teachable point of view, they may need help from their people in flushing it out, but they need to set the stage but then it has to be a very interactive, what I call virtuous teaching cycle environment, teach learn, teach learn, teach learn.

To develop others...

- Make it part of your routine

A good example to me of an outstanding leader developing other leaders is Myrtle Potter who at the time I am commenting was Chief Operating Officer of Genentech running the commercial side of the business. And she would take time at the end of every single meeting and do some coaching of the whole team on how we could perform as a team better, and then she would often take individuals and say, could we spend 10 minutes over a cup of coffee, I want to give you some feedback and coaching on that report that you just presented on or how you are handling a particularly difficult human resource issue, but it was part of her regular routine. And I think the challenge for all of us as leaders is to make that a way of life and it is built into the

fabric of how we lead and it is not a one off event, three times a year. It is happening almost every day.

To develop others...

- Make it a priority

One of the biggest challenges in getting people kind of on this path is to overcome some of their own resistance, either fear or the way I view the world I don't have time for this, everybody can make time. Roger Enrico is CEO of Pepsi. He didn't have time to go off for a week at a time and run training sessions. He had to readjust his calendar. So it requires you to look in the mirror and say, is this important. If it is important, of course I can make the time. Then I have to get over my own anxiety on how well I can do it, but it is a commitment to get on the path that says: this is how I am going to drive my own performance and the performance of my colleagues.

To develop others...

- Learn to teach

I think the biggest mistake is to assume you are going to be good at it right off the bat. It is like learning anything else. First time you go out and try and play tennis, good luck. But you got to stay with it and you got to engage your people in helping make you better and them better. And so it is a journey you need to get on, not I am going to do it perfectly when I start out.

If you want to be a great leader who is a great teacher, it's very simple. You have got to dive into the deep end of the pool. But you've got to dive into the pool with preparation. I don't want you drowning. I want you succeeding. It is extraordinarily rewarding for most human beings to teach others. I think once you can turn that switch on, it is self perpetuating. You get a lot of reinforcement, your team is better. You perform better because your performance goes up and it becomes this virtuous teaching cycle.

Your opportunity to develop others

We've heard why developing others can drive greater business results, and how to make the most of your leader-led development efforts. The materials provided in Develop Others enable you to create personalized learning experiences for YOUR team within the flow of their daily activities. Use the guides and projects to engage your team quickly. And to explore how key concepts apply to them in the context of their priorities and goals.

The value of teaching is the performance of the organization is totally dependent on making your people smarter and more aligned every day as the world changes. In the 21st century we are not going to get by with command and control. We are going to have to get by with knowledge creation. The way you create knowledge in an organization is you create these virtuous teaching cycles where you are teaching and learning simultaneously, responding to customer demands and changes, responding to changes in the global environment. My bottom line is if you're not teaching, you're not leading.

A leader's most important role in any organization is making good judgments—well informed, wise decisions about people, strategy and crises that produce the desired outcomes. When a leader shows consistently good judgment, little else matters. When he or she shows poor judgment nothing else

matters. In addition to making their own good judgment calls, good leaders develop good judgment among their team members.

**Dr. Noel M. Tichy****Professor, University of Michigan Ross School of Business**

Dr. Noel M. Tichy is Professor of Management and Organizations, and Director of the Global Business Partnership at the University of Michigan Ross School of Business. The Global Business Partnership links companies and students around the world to develop and engage business leaders to incorporate global citizenship activities, both environmental projects and human capital development, for those at the bottom of the pyramid. Previously, Noel was head of General Electric's Leadership Center at Crotonville, where he led the transformation to action learning at GE. Between 1985 and 1987, he was Manager of Management Education for GE where he directed its worldwide development efforts at Crotonville. He currently consults widely in both the private and public sectors. He is a senior partner in Action Learning Associates. Noel is author of numerous books and articles, including:

For more information about Noel Tichy, visit <http://www.noeltichy.com>.

## Share an Idea

Leaders are in a unique position to recognize the ideas and tools that are most relevant and useful for their teams. If you only have a few minutes, consider sharing an idea or tool from this topic with your team or peers that is relevant and timely to their situation.

For example, consider sending one of the three recommended ideas or tools below to your team with your comments or questions on how the idea or tool can be of value to your organization. By simply sharing the item, you can easily engage others in important conversations and activities relevant to your goals and priorities.

[Steps for receiving feedback](#)

[Tips for when not to give feedback](#)

[Planning a feedback session worksheet](#)

To share an idea, tip, step, or tool with your comments via e-mail, select the EMAIL link in the upper right corner of the page that contains the idea, tip, step, or tool that you wish to share.

## Discussion 1: Preparing to give feedback

When you give constructive feedback to work associates, you support them in performing at their best. Feedback can encourage more effective work practices, redirect behavior in a more beneficial direction, and ensure that appropriate standards are set for individual and team performance—but *only* if feedback is delivered well.

Your team can make substantial contributions to the performance of your unit or department by improving their capacity to give constructive feedback.

Use these resources to lead a discussion with your team about two key aspects of giving effective feedback: (1) determining the proper timing for feedback and (2) structuring a feedback meeting.

Download resources:

[Discussion Invitation: Preparing to Give Feedback](#)  
[Discussion Guide: Preparing to Give Feedback](#)  
[Discussion Slides: Preparing to Give Feedback \(optional\)](#)  
[Tips for Preparing for and Leading the Discussion](#)

The discussion you have with your team will help individual team members improve their ability to give constructive feedback.

Working through the discussion guide can take up to 45 minutes. If you prefer a shorter 15- or 30-minute session, you may want to focus only on those concepts and activities most relevant to your situation.

## Discussion 2: Receiving feedback

While positive feedback is always welcome, corrective feedback can be difficult to hear, accept, and act on. Though members of your team may feel defensive about suggestions for improving their skills, attitudes, or effectiveness, being able to receive feedback with an open mind is critical to the team's professional growth and development—and to the ongoing success of the organization.

Your team can make substantial contributions to your unit or department by enhancing their capacity to receive constructive feedback.

Use these resources to lead a discussion with your team about two key aspects of receiving feedback: (1) preparing to receive constructive feedback, and (2) staying open during the feedback session.

Download resources:

[Discussion Invitation: Receiving Feedback](#)  
[Discussion Guide: Receiving Feedback](#)  
[Discussion Slides: Receiving Feedback \(optional\)](#)  
[Tips for Preparing for and Leading the Discussion](#)

The discussion you have with your team will help individual team members improve their ability to receive constructive feedback.

Working through the discussion guide can take up to 45 minutes. If you prefer a shorter 15- or 30-minute session, you may want to focus only on those concepts and activities most relevant to your situation.

## Start a Group Project

Just like any change effort, successfully incorporating new skills and behaviors into one's daily activities and habits takes time and effort. After reviewing or discussing the concepts in this topic, your direct reports will still need your support to fully apply new concepts and skills. They will need to overcome a variety of barriers including a lack of time, lack of confidence, and a fear of making mistakes. They will also need opportunities to hone their skills and break old habits. To help ensure their success, you can provide safe opportunities for individuals and your team as a whole to practice and experiment with new skills and behaviors on the job.

For example, to encourage the adoption of new norms, you can provide your team members with coaching, feedback, and additional time to complete tasks that require the use of new skills.

Management approaches such as these will encourage team members to experiment with new skills until they become proficient.

Group learning projects provide another valuable technique for accelerating team members' development of new behaviors. A group learning project is an on-the-job activity aimed at providing team members with direct experience implementing their new knowledge and skills. Through a learning project, team members discover how new concepts work in the context of their situation, while simultaneously having a direct and tangible impact on the organization.

The documents below provide steps, tips, and a template for initiating a group learning project with your team, along with two project recommendations for this topic.

Download resources:

[Tips for Initiating and Supporting a Learning Project](#)

[Learning Project Plan Template](#)

[Learning Project: Soliciting Feedback from Employees](#)

[Learning Project: Planning and Delivering Peer-to-Peer Feedback](#)

## Block That Defense: How to Make Sure Your Constructive Criticism Works

[Anne Field. "Block That Defense: How to Make Sure Your Constructive Criticism Works." \*Harvard Management Update\*, September 2007.](#)

[Download file](#)

### Summary

Why do top executives have difficulty receiving and responding to constructive criticism? Because so many highfliers have received little criticism in their careers. The result is that when receiving criticism, the highest-performing employees in an organization are the ones most likely to become defensive—to screen out criticism and place the blame on anyone and everyone but themselves. Although getting highfliers to take in and respond to honest feedback can be tough, it's not impossible. Learn how to get through your best managers' defenses and have your feedback heard.

## Feedback That Works

[Cynthia M. Phoel. "Feedback That Works." \*Harvard Management Update\*, September 2006.](#)

[Download file](#)

### Summary

Fundamentally, feedback is a good thing. But most managers say they dislike giving feedback. Moreover, they don't think the feedback they do give is as effective as it could be. This article distills the expertise of several management thought leaders into eight specific suggestions for creating effective, positive feedback conversations that result in better performance for managers and career growth for employees.

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